

ISLAM

A

Unifying Force

By

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CONTENTS

One God; One Humanity	5
One Religion	5
Islam – Religion of all Prophets	6
Islam is Submission to God	6
All Prophets were Muslims.....	7
Muslims Believe in all Prophets	7
Islam Unites People	8
Muslims Believe in all Scriptures	8
Qur'an Clears Prophets of Calumnies	9
Judgment Day – A Necessity.....	10
Who will Enjoy the vision of God.....	10
Belief and Right Deeds	11
What is a Righteous Deed?	11
The best of Both the Worlds	11
Islam Regulates all Actions	12
No Separation of Religion and Politics.....	12
Three Props of Islamic Polity	13

Fraternity and Equality	13
Verdict of History	14
No Compulsion in Religion	14
Brotherhood of Man.....	15
Benefit Humanity	15

In the Name of Allah, The Most Gracious, The Most Merciful

Islam A Unifying Force

[This speech was delivered by Muhammad Yusuf, then Secretary-General, and Later Amir (President), Jama'at-e-Islami Hind, at the All India Divine Life Conference held in Cuttack on 19.2.1972.]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honour to address this august assembly of our learned brothers and sisters, gathered under the auspices of the Divine Life Society. In an age of utter materialism, conferences of this type prove conclusively that man does not live by bread alone, but that his spiritual and moral urges also need satisfaction. As a representative of the Jama'at-e-Islami Hind I shall describe briefly some salient features of Islam, the religion of all prophets and how it ordains a life of piety and righteousness for the individual and useful for society.

One God, One Humanity

Islam gave the clarion call that there is not only one God but also One Humanity and One Religion, or way of life. Unity of God, Unity of Man and Unity of Religion are, therefore, the main features of Islam.

One Religion

To begin with, God did not give to mankind many religions, but since the inception of the world there has been one and only one religion which was always known as the Religion of total submission and complete obedience to the One and the Only God, the Creator, the Sustainer, the Lord, the

Sovereign, the Law-giver, the Judge of man's actions Who will reward the righteous and punish the transgressors.

Unity of God 'therefore' naturally postulates one basic religion; plurality of gods means many religions. This religion of total submission and complete obedience to God was called by different names in different languages; in Arabic the word 'Islam' signifies total submission and complete obedience to God.

Islam did not take its name from the founder of the religion, nor is it named after the community, race or people in which it took its birth, but God himself described Religion by the name of Islam. Says the Qur'an: "Surely the Religion with Allah is Islam" (3:19) i.e. submission and obedience to God.

Islam – Religion of All Prophets

Some Europeans mistakenly called Islam as Muhammadanism after the name of the last Prophet, just as people called Christianity after the name of Jesus Christ, Zoroastrianism after its founder, Zoroaster, Budhism after its founder, Gautama Budha, or Judaism, the religion of the Jews after the name of the tribe, Judah (of the country of Judea), or Hinduism after the name of Hind or Hindustan. Islam, however, claims to be the common religion of all prophets of the world, hence it discards the theory of plurality of religions. The great aim of Islam is to unite mankind rather than divide it. Every child is born in Islam, says the last Prophet; it is his parents that make him otherwise.

Islam is Submission to God

Islam thus means surrender, submission and obedience to the Will and Laws of Allah, the only one god Whose attributes are shared by no one, the attribute of mercy reigning over all. He has no partner in Godhead nor in His attributes. It is Allah and Allah alone who created the universe and Who is the only Ruler, the sole Sovereign, the law-giver and the only Sustainer of the universe. He provided man not only with his material needs but also catered for his spiritual and moral requirements.

He gave him guidance to live a good and righteous life individually as well as collectively. He gave him the knowledge of good and bad, right and wrong, moral and immoral life. This Guidance which comprises rules to lead a righteous living in all walks of life is called Religion. Since God is the fountain-head of Religion, He could not have given conflicting or contradictory instructions to different people in different ages about their behaviour towards the basic issues of life. The basic and the most fundamental behaviour was that men should submit, surrender to and obey their only Lord, their only God, their one Sovereign, and in accordance therewith they should perform their duty towards God and His creatures.

All Prophets were Muslims

According to Islam, God sent His apostles or prophets or messengers to all peoples and races in all ages to guide them to the right course of action. It is not that a prophet appeared in Arabia alone; nay, prophets appeared in many lands, in different times, amongst many races and spoke languages of their own people. The first prophet was Adam and the last one was Muhammad and in between there were myriads of prophets S.A.W. They all professed, practised and propagated Islam, i.e., submission to God, hence they and all their followers throughout the ages were Muslims, which word means those who submit to God.

Muslims Believe in All Prophets

It is essential for, incumbent, obligatory and mandatory upon a Muslim to believe and respect each and every prophet, no matter to which race, community, country or age the prophet belonged. In fact Muslims, while soliciting peace of Allah on themselves in five times daily prayers, solicit it as many as 17 times a day on all righteous servants of Allah i.e. on all prophets and their followers.

We make no distinction between one prophet and another – thus says the Qur'an. The name of all prophets are not given in the Qur'an, but the last Prophet and his followers believe in

all the prophets before him. The last Prophet did not contradict the pristine teachings of any prophet but verified them all. Similarly all prophets of yore testified to the truth of the last Prophet. The Qur'an says that Allah took a covenant from all prophets that they (and their followers through them) should believe in and aid the last Prophet and laid an obligation on the last Prophet that he and his followers should believe in all prophets before him. Hence, the advent of the last Prophet was foretold by all prophets and the last Prophet verified all of them.

The Qur'an says:

"O apostles! eat of the good things and do good: surely I (i.e. God) know what you do". (23 : 51)

"And surely this your community (or religion) is one community (or religion) and I am your Lord, therefore, be careful (of duty) to Me". (23 : 51, 52)

Islam Unites People

It is apparent from these verses that all prophets belonged to one community and professed, practised and propagated one religion. This proves our claim that Islam aims at uniting people, rather than dividing them.

Muslims Believe in All Scriptures

The teachings of the prophets were given to them through revelations of God. Various prophets received scriptures, some of which are named in the Qur'an and others are not. To become a Muslim one must essentially believe in all these pristine scriptures of God. The Qur'an which is the last revelation is undisputedly the most widely read book of the world. It is a collection of all that is best in all sacred books and it contains all that is viable, fundamental and basic in them.

"In the Qur'an are all the right books or ordinances of God". (5 : 48)

The Qur'an, the last revelation, verifies all previous revelations. It says so in several places. One quotation is:

"And this is a Book (i.e. Qur'an) We (God) have revealed, blessed, verifying that which is before it." (6:92)

Qur'an Clears Prophets Of Calumnies

The Qur'an corrects those false notions which men has adopted due to manipulations of scriptures or otherwise. Some prophets were raised to the status of divinity; others were represented as sunk in deep immorality. The Qur'an repudiated both these charges. It argued that a mortal who ate, slept and suffered from human frailties could not be a God, nor could God having supernatural powers, be a model for human beings. Again certain scriptures accused certain prophets of immorality. Such Hindu gods as Shiva who could never have been imagined to be immoral are accused of gross immorality; similarly Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, is accused of fornication. The Qur'an cleared Mary, and Jesus Christ and some other prophets of the calumnies heaped upon them. It called Mary a righteous virtuous lady and Jesus Christ a respected prophet and an honoured servant of God. And although all the innumerable prophets are not mentioned in the Qur'an, it declared the truth that all prophets were sinless, thus clearing them of all the false charges levelled against them.

Correction of wrong notions, beliefs, doctrines and superstitions degrading humanity and declaration of the sinlessness of the prophets are a unique achievement of Islam. In this way the Qur'an guards all previous revelations. It says:

"And We (i.e. God) revealed to your (the last Prophet) the Book with truth verifying what is before it of the Book and a guardian over it." (5 : 51)

It is clear that a belief in all prophets of the world and a belief in all pristine Divine Scriptures which is tantamount to an acknowledgment of truth in all of them, is a distinctive and exclusive feature of Islam. Thus we are sure that we have not rejected any truth given by God to any nation, nor bypassed the good behaviour of any prophet.

The simultaneous belief in all prophets and in all scriptures also leads us to the irresistible conclusion that there has been

only one religion and not a plethora of religions. This religion was no other than Islam, i.e. submission and there can be no higher conception of religion than submission to God, our Lord and your Lord, the Lord of all. Thus Islam is the universal, the cosmopolitan, the oldest and yet the latest religion.

Judgment Day – A Necessity

The purpose of sending prophets to all people was to impart to them the Divine knowledge of what is good and bad, right and wrong, moral and immoral so that men may fashion their lives according to Divine Guidance and they may not plead ignorance of the Divine Will and Law on the Day of Judgment, the day when the dead will be raised to life and everyone will receive reward or punishment according to his good or bad actions. That there should be a Day of Judgment when man's actions should be judged is a logical and moral necessity, because when God has given in trust to human beings all the resources. He must take an account of them on the final Day of Judgment. Everlasting pleasure or everlasting punishment has been respectively promised in the Qur'an for those who act righteously or indulge in bad deeds.

Who Will Enjoy the Vision of God?

At the time of bereavement a righteous man gets immense consolation from a belief in the Hereafter since he knows that through the grace and mercy of Allah he will meet his near and dear ones who have departed from this world. He will meet them and live with them for ever in a world of unparalleled joy, happiness and comfort, where there will be no grief, no disease, no further death. There he will also live with the righteous ancestors whom he had never seen and will for ever enjoy the company of all prophets, the righteous and the martyrs. And above all he will for ever enjoy the vision of God just as he sees the full moon in this world. This is indeed a great achievement!

Belief And Right Deeds

Islam thus comprises belief plus right actions. Besides a belief in Allah, in all prophets, in all pristine Scriptures, in the Judgment Day, Islam also enjoins a belief in the angels who are not gods or deities but are unseen beings, regulating the affairs of the universe under the command of God. Gabriel, an important angel delivered the Divine message to prophets. Two angels accompany every person and record what he says or does. This record will be presented on the judgment Day and everyone shall be rewarded or punished according to his deeds.

What is A Righteous Deed?

Right actions or righteous deeds are only those which are performed to please God alone and are in consonance with His Law. These consist of duty to God and duty to His creatures. Five times daily prayers, one month's fasting, payment of Zakat, (the amount, paid annually by those who possess a certain amount of wealth, for the benefit of the poor which constitutes the best form of social insurance) and pilgrimage to Makkah once in life time for those who can afford to go, are reckoned as obligatory to God.

Besides these a Muslim must perform his duty to God's creatures by doing good to them. He should do good primarily to his parents and relatives as well as to neighbours, to the poor and the needy, to fellow workers, in short, to all human beings and even to animals.

The Best Of Both The Worlds

In fact a believer has so to involve himself in this world that he may achieve success in the next world. He is not required to renounce this world and its lawful enjoyment, but God enjoins that man should prefer the next world to the present one because this world is ephemeral and the next one is eternal; the enjoyment of this world is temporary and poor in quality and quantity as compared with that of the next world. Hence man should enjoy in this world those lawful material benefits tempered with spiritual and moral values which would

make him ever-happy in the Hereafter, but eschew those material benefits which would make him liable to punishment in the next world. The constant prayer of a Muslim as taught by the Qur'an is "Our Lord, give us good in this world and good in the Hereafter, and save us from the chastisement of the fire". (2:201) Thus a Muslim aspires to achieve the best of both the worlds!

Islam Regulates All Actions

Another distinctive feature of Islam is that religion is not a mere conglomeration of rites, rituals, ceremonies and moral instructions, but Islam as a religion regulates the whole gamut of man's life, be it the so-called religious side, the spiritual, the moral, the educational, the social, the economic or the political side. In all these spheres of life Islam gives clear, unambiguous and basic instructions which man must follow for he will be accountable to God on the Judgment Day not only for some actions but for all his actions, be they spiritual, moral, social, economic or political. The lives of all prophets and the life of the last Prophet whose history is recorded in detail prove that they and their followers followed Divine Guidance, i.e., Religion, in all walks of life, and not only in some limited spheres of life.

The last Prophet did not only lead prayers in the mosque, but he was simultaneously a spiritual head, a teacher of morals and manners, a judge who decided cases, a statesman, a politician, a general and a ruler whose actions in all those capacities were tampered with spiritual and moral values. The Qur'an says that there is an exemplar for you in the last Prophet, which means that he serves as a model for men in all walks of life.

No Separation Of Religion And Politics

It is, therefore apparent that Islam does not recognise a divorce between religion and politics, but politics and economics too are subservient to the Divine Law.

Three Props Of Islamic Polity

In politics, for example, sovereignty belongs to God and God alone, but man who is regarded as the noblest creature according to Islam occupies a place of pre-eminence in the universe and is placed in it as the vicegerent of God. His mission therefore is to fill this world with justice and truth by enforcing the Divine Law and making and enforcing subsidiary laws where necessary in accordance with the Divine Law. Sovereignty of God, vicegerency of man, and supremacy of Divine Law are the three props on which the political framework of Islam stands.

Similarly in economics, some of the basic instructions are that there is no place for interest or usury which forms the backbone of capitalism, nor for luxuries, monopolies, etc. A man cannot also be deprived of his lawful possessions without his consent and compensation, as is the case under communism or socialism.

Fraternity And Equality

Similarly in social life there is no place for gambling and drinking. Prohibition, that unrealised dream of the Constitution of India, was made a reality through Islam. Similarly untouchability, which our Constitution-makers wanted to remove through legislation but could not succeed, was wiped out by Islam, as well as the wrong notions of high and low birth. Equality and fraternity are visible five times a day in every mosque and on the two festivals of Id. A grand spectacle of equality, fraternity and brotherhood of different nations and tribes of the world is to be seen at the time of Hajj, when men of many nationalities perform their duty of God, all attired in the same white seamless dress. In fact Islam aims at creating a fraternity of all nations on terms of equality in the Kingdom of God.

Regulation of social conduct, besides teaching high morals, is also an outstanding feature of Islam. Some of the social rules are described in the Qur'an as follows:

"O you who believe: if an unrighteous person comes to you with a report, look carefully into it lest you harm a people in ignorance, then be sorry for what you have done". (49 : 6)

Again it says,

"And if two parties of the believers quarrel, make peace between them; but if one of them acts wrongfully towards the other, fight that which acts wrongfully until it returns to Allah's command; then if it returns make peace between them with justice and act equitably; surely Allah loves those who act equitably". (49:9)

This injunction is 13 centuries old; and it is only 3 or 4 decades back that the U.N. Charter adopted a provision for taking effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace and for the suppression of acts of aggression and other breaches of peace. In fact Islamic principles have benefited many nations and are daily gaining ground. Monotheism, for example, is replacing the doctrine of plurality of gods.

Verdict of History

History proves that those who followed Divine Guidance as given by prophets prospered and filled this world with happiness, prosperity and plenty. The history of the followers of the Last Prophet is a comparatively recent proof of this assertion: The Histories of Pharaoh, Nimrod, and Sodom prove that those who disobeyed the Divine Guidance, proclaimed by all prophets in all ages and opposed the prophets, met their doom. Their fate should be an eye-opener to those who go against the Divine Guidance.

No Compulsion in Religion

This, however, does not mean that people must be forced to accept the Religion. The Qur'an says:

"There is no compulsion in religion. Truly the right way has become clearly distinguished from error; therefore whosoever disbelieves in the devil and believes in Allah,

he indeed has laid hold on the firmest handle which shall not break off". (2:256)

"You shall have your recompense and I shall have my recompense", is another teaching of the Qur'an. There is so much toleration in Islam that the Qur'an forbids calling names even to false gods. In fact God is so very merciful that He forgives even the worst type of traitor in his kingdom, if he repents. He is not the Lord of Muslims alone, but He is the Lord of all people. Similarly the Last Prophet is said in the Qur'an to be mercy for all people, and the Qur'an itself is called a Guidance to all people. Since God, the Last Prophet and the Qur'an are for all people, they furnish a broad basis for human sympathy and brotherhood. Several Qur'anic verses glorify the noble concept of the unity and brotherhood of man. Says the Qur'an:

"O you men! Surely We (i.e. God) have created you of a male and a female and made you tribes and families that you many know each other; surely the most honourable of you with Allah is the one among you most careful of his duty". (49 : 13)

Brotherhood of Man

Thus all human being are the progeny of Adam, the first prophet of God. Hence there is blood relationship amongst all men. A common progenitor furnishes a sure and solid basis for the concepts of human unity and brotherhood of man. They are all members of one indivisible human family and should, therefore, live together like members of a noble family consisting of the noblest creatures as man is said to be. They should co-operate with one another in all those activities that benefit mankind.

Benefit Humanity

Brothers and sisters: We have gathered here today under the auspices of the Divine Life Society with the object of making friendly and brotherly contacts with one another. In this ultra-materialistic age those who love God and fear Him

have gathered here not for the purpose of harming any one but for benefiting humanity so that God may be pleased with us. We should, therefore, strive to banish darkness, superstition, ignorance, illiteracy, disease, poverty and all those things that degrade humanity and try to inculcate all those virtues which have been common to all the prophets of the world. I wish and pray that God may lead all of us in the right direction and help us to keep up that spirit of co-operation which has inspired us together here.

As far as we are concerned, the Jama'at-e-Islami Hind will be at your service to help you in understanding Islam, the Qur'an, the acts and the sayings of the last Prophet who is called in the Qur'an as the Mercy for all people. It is now for the people to take advantage of that Mercy.

Thank you very much.